

Reading Comprehension Strategies in EFL Classrooms: A Cognitive and Sociolinguistic Approach in Indonesian Schools

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Abstract

This study analyzes students' reading comprehension strategies in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction in Indonesian schools through a cognitive and sociolinguistic approach. It focuses on how Indonesian learners interpret English texts when their linguistic proficiency is limited and when the sociocultural context of the text differs from their local experiences. Employing a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research was conducted in three secondary schools in Bandung Regency. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and analysis of students' reading exercises and written reflections. The analysis integrated the framework of cognitive reading strategies, metacognition, inference, prediction, and self-monitoring, with the sociolinguistic perspective of literacy events to explore the relationship between individual cognitive processes and the social context of learning. The findings reveal that students who actively employ predicting, questioning, and summarizing strategies demonstrate deeper textual understanding. Linking reading materials to local sociocultural contexts, such as environmental issues or community traditions, significantly enhances motivation and engagement. However, a gap remains between teacher-centered instruction and students' social experiences of meaning-making. The study introduces the Cognitive-Sociolinguistic Reading Framework, which integrates cognitive and sociolinguistic theories to reconceptualize reading comprehension as both a mental and sociocultural practice, contributing theoretical and pedagogical insights for EFL education in Southeast Asia.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. However, in many Indonesian secondary schools, it remains one of the most persistent challenges for learners. Although students are often proficient in sentence structure, vocabulary, and various reading test formats, many still struggle to interpret texts at a deeper level (Hezam et al., 2022; Ismail & Edi, 2022). While they may be able to identify main ideas or answer literal questions, they often fail to explain the rationale behind ideas or connect the text to broader sociocultural contexts. This phenomenon suggests that reading comprehension instruction in Indonesia remains heavily exam-oriented, emphasizing information recall rather than critical thinking and social meaning-making. Within this context, the present study seeks to explore how Indonesian EFL learners construct meaning while reading English texts, and to what extent cognitive strategies and sociolinguistic

contexts influence that process (Tanjung et al., 2021; Wijaya, 2021).

National and international assessments consistently report low reading proficiency among Indonesian students in EFL contexts. According to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Indonesian students' reading literacy scores have remained below the OECD average for the past two decades. One major contributing factor is the focus on literal comprehension and grammatical accuracy rather than on the development of higher-order cognitive strategies that enable learners to think about what they read (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). National studies similarly indicate that teachers predominantly employ traditional approaches focused on textual comprehension, providing limited opportunities for students to develop inferencing, predicting, and self-monitoring skills (Nanda & Azmy, 2020; Setyono, 2018). Consequently, students tend to perform better on multiple-choice tests than on tasks requiring interpretive or critical engagement with texts.

In addition to cognitive challenges, sociocultural contexts play a crucial role in how students understand English texts. Many reading materials in Indonesian EFL textbooks are based on Western contexts, depicting urban lifestyles, modern culture, or global issues that are distant from students' everyday realities (Costansa & Sarbunan, 2021; Manuputty, 2022). As a result, learners often find it difficult to connect these texts to their own experiences. For instance, a text on environmental problems in urban areas that describes pollution in major European cities may not resonate with students living in semi-rural areas of South Bandung. Such contextual disconnection reduces students' emotional and social engagement with reading. As Lituely and Serpara (2021) emphasize, literacy should not be viewed merely as a technical skill of word recognition but as a social practice embedded in identity, values, and community experience.

Previous literature has highlighted the importance of cognitive reading strategies in EFL learning. Tabelessy and Umkeketony (2022) argue that effective readers not only understand text content but also actively monitor their own thinking through metacognitive strategies such as predicting, questioning, and summarizing. Similarly, Apituley et al. (2022) and Hukubun et al. (2022) stress that reading is not merely a linguistic process but a complex cognitive one, requiring readers to connect text, context, and background knowledge. In the Indonesian context, studies by Deliany and Cahyono (2020), Fitriyah et al. (2019), and Lestari (2020) demonstrate that students trained to use cognitive reading strategies show significant improvement in comprehension. However, most of these studies focus primarily on internal cognitive processes without adequately accounting for the surrounding sociocultural factors.

Beyond cognitive approaches, sociolinguistic perspectives on literacy emphasize that reading always occurs within particular social contexts. Drawing from the New Literacy Studies framework, Deygers and Malone (2019) reject the notion of literacy as universal or neutral; instead, they conceptualize it as a social practice tied to values, power, and culture. Likewise, Baker and Riches (2018) and Sultana (2019) highlight that meaning-making in reading is inseparable from the discourse communities in which readers participate. In language education, Genç et al. (2020) contend that language and culture are inextricably

intertwined; to understand a text is to understand the social world in which the language operates. Studies by Häggström and Schmidt (2021) and Rad (2019) further demonstrate that when teachers connect reading materials to local cultural contexts, students show marked improvement in both motivation and comprehension.

In the Indonesian context, however, research integrating cognitive and sociocultural perspectives in reading pedagogy remains scarce. While some studies emphasize cognitive strategies, others focus on cultural and social dimensions of literacy (Alakrash & Razak, 2021; Drajadi et al., 2018; Purwandari et al., 2022). Few, however, attempt to integrate these two domains within a single theoretical framework. Reading comprehension in EFL contexts, therefore, should be understood not only as an individual mental activity but also as a socially mediated process shaped by language and culture (Newman, 2018; Vygotsky, 2008). The lack of studies linking these perspectives leaves a conceptual gap in understanding how Indonesian students construct meaning when encountering culturally unfamiliar texts.

Several recent studies attempt to bridge this gap. For example, Feber and Christover (2021) and Preece (2019) found that combining cognitive reading strategies with cultural schema activation significantly enhances comprehension. Similarly, Pathan et al. (2018) and Wigdorowitz et al. (2022) observed that contextually grounded reading instruction encourages students to perceive texts not merely as information sources but as part of an ongoing social dialogue. Nevertheless, few studies have developed a conceptual model that fully integrates cognitive and sociolinguistic theories. Furthermore, little research has been conducted in Indonesian secondary schools, particularly in semi-urban settings such as Bandung Regency, where diverse linguistic and cultural realities intersect with national English curricula.

Addressing this gap, the present study proposes a new perspective on reading practices in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Using a qualitative multiple-case study design, the research investigates how students from three secondary schools in Bandung Regency construct meaning when reading English texts embedded in different cultural and social contexts. The analysis focuses on two main dimensions: (a) the cognitive strategies employed by students to construct meaning and (b) the influence of sociocultural contexts on this process. Drawing from classroom observations, interviews, and students' reading outputs, the study conceptualizes reading as an intersection between learners' mental and social worlds.

This approach not only offers a deeper understanding of how Indonesian students read but also proposes a conceptual foundation for a more reflective and context-sensitive literacy pedagogy. By integrating cognitive and sociolinguistic theories, this study develops the Cognitive–Sociolinguistic Reading Framework, which situates learners' cognitive processes within their sociocultural contexts. Reading comprehension is thus viewed simultaneously as a mental and social activity. Ultimately, this research contributes both theoretically and practically by advancing literacy education that bridges global texts and local experiences, a crucial step toward more equitable, reflective, and human-centered language education in Indonesia.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a multiple-case study design, aiming to develop a deep understanding of how Indonesian students construct meaning while reading English texts within their sociocultural contexts. The qualitative approach was selected not merely to describe phenomena but to interpret the meanings underlying students' actions, experiences, and thought processes. As Motulsky (2021) and Sarfo et al. (2021) explain, qualitative research prioritizes understanding and interpretation of subjective meaning within natural settings. In this study, reading is conceptualized not as a technical skill but as a socially and cognitively situated practice embedded in students' lived classroom experiences. The multiple-case study design enables comparison across schools with diverse social and institutional characteristics, allowing both shared patterns and local particularities to emerge.

The research sites consisted of three secondary schools in Bandung Regency, SMAN 1 Margahayu, SMKN 2 Katapang, and SMAS Pasundan 3, representing three educational contexts: public academic, vocational, and private culturally-based institutions. The sites were selected purposively to capture socio-economic diversity, variation in teaching practices, and representation of the semi-urban West Java context. Bandung Regency provides a dynamic educational landscape where students live in multilingual, multicultural environments but learn English through nationally standardized, globally oriented curricula. This setting thus offers a rich sociolinguistic field to examine the interaction between cognitive strategies and social contexts in reading comprehension.

Participants included nine students and three English teachers from the three schools. From each school, three students were selected through maximum variation sampling, representing high, medium, and low reading proficiency levels based on teachers' formative assessments. This sampling strategy ensured diversity in reading strategies and cognitive approaches. The English teachers also served as key informants, providing insight into classroom reading practices and how local cultural elements were either integrated into or separated from English instruction.

Data collection was conducted over three months using three primary techniques: classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Six classroom observations were conducted at each school to capture real-time reading practices within teacher–student interactions. Observations were semi-participatory, with the researcher acting primarily as an observer while occasionally engaging in post-reading discussions. Field notes documented students' behaviors, the types of questions posed, and teachers' contextual explanations. In-depth interviews were then conducted with both teachers and students to explore their cognitive and interpretive processes. Students reflected on their reading strategies and difficulties, while teachers discussed their perceptions of the relationships among language, culture, and comprehension. Supplementary documents, including students' reading exercises, reflective journals, and lesson plans, were collected to triangulate observational and interview data.

The combination of these methods ensured data richness and credibility. Observation captured actual behaviors in natural contexts, interviews provided access to participants' subjective interpretations, and document analysis offered triangulated support for interpretation (Mäder, 2023). Data triangulation was achieved by cross-verifying findings across sources. For example, a student's reported difficulty in understanding a text was examined against classroom observations and written reading responses. Investigator triangulation was also applied, involving a peer researcher with literacy studies expertise to review portions of the data and preliminary interpretations to minimize subjective bias.

Data analysis followed a thematic procedure as outlined by Santos et al. (2020), comprising three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection; each observation and interview was transcribed and coded to identify emerging patterns. Inductive themes such as students' cognitive strategies, cultural contextualization, and teachers' responses to global texts were developed and compared across cases to identify both convergences and divergences. This analytical approach aligns with the study's exploratory and interpretive nature, aiming to uncover how reading practices are shaped by the dynamic interaction among cognition, language, and culture.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cognitive Reading Strategies and the Process of Meaning Construction

In the process of comprehending English texts, Indonesian students exhibit notable variation in their use of cognitive reading strategies. Based on classroom observations and interviews conducted in three secondary schools in Bandung Regency, strategies such as predicting, questioning, summarizing, and self-monitoring were employed differently depending on students' reading proficiency levels. Students with higher reading proficiency tended to engage in meaning-making actively before reading began, whereas those with lower proficiency generally processed texts in a linear and literal manner, without reflecting on deeper meanings. This finding suggests that reading comprehension is not merely a matter of linguistic ability, but also a cognitive skill that involves anticipating, interpreting, and regulating one's own thought processes while interacting with texts.

For instance, during one observation in Grade XI at SMAN 1 Margahayu, the classroom environment appeared dynamic. The teacher introduced a passage titled "Environmental Problems in Urban Areas" from the Pathway to English textbook. Before reading, students were asked to predict the text's content based on the title and accompanying image. Some students immediately hypothesized that it might be about "air pollution in big cities," while others added that it might also address waste management or urban behavior. During reading, certain students attempted to align their initial predictions with textual content, while others read monotonously, focusing solely on word-for-word translation. Afterward, students were instructed to summarize the passage, and those who had made predictions earlier produced more coherent and structured summaries.

This phenomenon indicates that predicting and summarizing serve as cognitive bridges connecting prior knowledge with new information derived from the text. El-Daly (2019) asserts that effective readers are not merely those who recognize linguistic forms, but those who actively construct meaning through cycles of prediction, confirmation, and reflection. Within this framework, the ability to make predictions prior to reading is not simply a technical routine, but part of a metacognitive awareness that prepares students' mental scaffolding. As one teacher at SMKN 2 Katapang remarked, students who "make guesses first" before reading "find it easier to recall text content and identify the main idea because they already have a direction of thought from the start."

However, not all students demonstrated the same level of reflective thinking. Interviews with three low-proficiency students revealed that they tended to focus primarily on surface linguistic aspects. One student, identified by the pseudonym Ls, explained that she "usually reads while checking the dictionary for difficult words." This approach reflects a high dependence on word-by-word translation without integrating textual meaning. Such tendencies were consistent with classroom observations at SMAS Pasundan 3, where several students paused frequently at every sentence, attempting to decipher each word's literal meaning. They rarely made inferences or reflected on implicit ideas. This condition exemplifies what Peters (2022) terms bottom-up processing dominance, where readers concentrate excessively on linguistic form and fail to activate top-down strategies that draw on world knowledge and sociocultural context.

Conversely, students with higher literacy levels exhibited stronger self-monitoring behaviors. During an interview, a student from SMAN 1 Margahayu, identified as An, stated that when she did not understand a part of the text, she would "pause, reread the previous sentence, and try to connect it with the earlier paragraph." This behavior illustrates a form of metacognitive control that enables readers to evaluate their comprehension process. Classroom observations corroborated this, showing that such students frequently annotated confusing sections and wrote small question marks in the margins as reminders to consult their teacher.

The questioning strategy, in particular, reflects growing metacognitive awareness fostered through classroom interaction. Teachers often encouraged students to pose open-ended, rather than purely literal, questions. For example, while discussing urban pollution, one student asked, "Are environmental problems in other countries also caused by people's behavior like here?" Such inquiries reveal that students were not confined to the text's surface meaning but sought to connect it with broader social realities. According to Peters (2021a), in the active meaning construction model, this process demonstrates readers' ability to engage critically and reflectively with texts rather than consuming information passively.

Emotional and motivational dimensions also influenced the use of cognitive strategies. Observations showed that students who found the reading topic engaging were more active in applying predictive and reflective questioning strategies. When reading materials related to their own lives, such as topics on the environment, cultural traditions, or community engagement, students exhibited higher engagement and enthusiasm. Conversely, when texts

appeared unfamiliar or culturally distant, their motivation decreased, and cognitive strategy use diminished. Peters (2021a) emphasizes that emotions and motivation play crucial roles in emotionally mediated cognition, wherein emotional engagement directly shapes thinking and comprehension processes. Among Indonesian students, emotional resonance often arises when texts connect with local values or lived experiences.

This interplay between cognitive strategy and emotional engagement was also evident across learning styles. A teacher at SMKN 2 Katapang noted, “Students with strong curiosity read differently. They are not satisfied with answers in the text, sometimes they challenge or compare it with their own lives.” This reinforces the idea that cognitive strategies are socially and emotionally constructed through curiosity-driven learning experiences.

Overall, the findings suggest that Indonesian students’ reading strategies are not products of mechanical training, but manifestations of reflective awareness shaped by the interaction between cognition, emotion, and social context. When teachers provide space for predictive thinking, reflective questioning, and self-evaluation, students begin to shift from passive readers to strategic, reflective ones. Hence, reading comprehension in EFL contexts entails not only linguistic competence but also cognitive and social capacities to negotiate meaning within diverse cultural frames.

Sociocultural Mediation in Reading Practices

In the context of English language learning in Indonesian schools, reading practices are deeply intertwined with students’ social and cultural realities. Language within a text is not a neutral system of signs to be decoded, but a representation of social worlds embedded with values, beliefs, and experiences. When students read English texts, they are not only encountering an unfamiliar linguistic system but also engaging with worldviews that may differ substantially from their own lived experiences. Findings from three schools in Bandung Regency reveal that students’ comprehension of English texts largely depends on their ability to bridge the meaning constructed by the text with their own sociocultural experiences.

In one observation at SMAN 1 Margahayu, a teacher introduced a passage titled “A Festival in Edinburgh.” The text described a Scottish music and arts festival, complete with traditional costumes and street parades. When asked comprehension questions, many students appeared confused and responded literally, repeating phrases from the passage. Some even whispered to peers, saying, “There’s no such event here,” signaling difficulty relating the text to familiar social realities. The teacher attempted to draw a parallel by saying that the festival was similar to local cultural events in Bandung, but this comparison was only partially effective because students lacked sufficient schema familiarity to interpret the social meaning of the described festival. This illustrates that when cultural contexts are too distant from students’ experiences, meaning-making becomes rigid and confined to literal translation.

Conversely, when teachers localized text topics to students’ lived experiences, engagement increased significantly. In another observation at SMKN 2 Katapang, the teacher used an environmental-themed passage from English for Vocational Students about a river-cleaning campaign in London. Rather than discussing it abstractly, the teacher invited

students to compare it with conditions in the nearby Citarum River. The teacher asked reflective questions such as, “What can we do in Bandung to make our river as clean as the one in the text?” The class immediately became lively. Students shared experiences of participating in local community clean-ups and described actions in English using phrases like “collecting trash,” “separating waste,” and “recycling bottles.” This example shows that when textual meaning is localized into familiar social experiences, students not only comprehend better but also feel emotionally connected to the text.

Interviews further supported this finding. One student, pseudonym Nn, explained that when the reading “relates to life here,” she feels “more excited to read because I can imagine it.” Conversely, when texts discuss unfamiliar topics such as European traditions or foreign campaigns, she feels “confused and quickly bored.” This aligns with Reyes and Calle-Arango’s (2022) theory of situated literacy, which posits that reading is always embedded within specific social contexts rather than being an isolated mental act. Thus, comprehension is constructed not only through linguistic ability but through membership in communities of practice that shape ways of thinking and interpreting the world.

Teachers in this context function as social mediators, helping students negotiate meaning between foreign texts and local realities. Often unconsciously, teachers’ strategies, such as contextual explanations, use of local examples, and discussion-based learning, serve as tangible forms of sociocultural mediation. In an observation at SMAS Pasundan 3, for example, a teacher discussing “Cultural Heritage Preservation” linked it to the local *ngalungsur* *pusaka* tradition, where Sundanese communities pass down heirlooms as symbols of cultural continuity. Although the text described European heritage preservation, the teacher highlighted the shared values between the two practices. Students responded enthusiastically, contributing family stories and local experiences. In this setting, reading became not only a cognitive exercise but also a platform for cultural reflection and shared meaning-making.

Such processes of localizing meaning enhance not only comprehension but also cognitive engagement. When students see themselves reflected in textual meaning, they become more motivated and invested in critical interpretation. As one teacher at SMAN 1 Margahayu noted, students “respond more quickly when the reading topic connects to their everyday life.” The teacher added that “a simple local example can make the discussion much more interactive.” These findings align with Vygotsky’s (2008) socially mediated learning theory, which emphasizes that individual understanding develops through meaningful social interaction. In reading contexts, teachers act as more knowledgeable others who bridge the gap between foreign texts and students’ local knowledge.

Beyond comprehension, sociocultural mediation also shapes students’ literacy identity. By linking textual interpretation with lived experience, students begin to perceive themselves not merely as receivers of knowledge but as active participants in a literacy community. In one discussion on “Community Clean-Up Projects” at SMKN 2 Katapang, several students shared stories of local environmental initiatives. One student, pseudonym Rf, remarked that after reading the text, he was “inspired to organize a similar activity in my

village.” This demonstrates that reading English texts can become a transformative act through which students negotiate global meanings with local values, turning literacy into a tool of social empowerment and identity formation.

These findings underscore that reading in Indonesia’s EFL context is not a simple transfer of meaning from text to reader, but a social negotiation process involving identity, culture, and lived experience. Deep comprehension emerges only when instruction situates reading within students’ social and cultural realities. When teachers act as mediators connecting global meanings with local experiences, reading becomes a socially meaningful encounter. Hence, literacy can be understood, as Peters (2021b) asserts, as a situated practice, a practice always embedded in particular values, norms, and lived experiences.

The Gap Between Teacher-Centered Instruction and Students’ Meaning-Making Experience

Within the dynamics of reading instruction in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms in Indonesian secondary schools, a persistent tension is evident between teacher-centered pedagogical practices and students’ more complex social experiences in meaning-making. This imbalance emerged as one of the most significant findings of field research conducted in three secondary schools in Bandung Regency. Although national curricula and textbooks have emphasized the importance of student-centered learning and the development of critical thinking skills, classroom realities reveal that many teachers remain entrenched in traditional routines that position them as the sole authority and source of knowledge. Reading instruction is often reduced to answering comprehension questions or identifying word meanings, while the reflective, social, and interpretive dimensions of reading are rarely explored.

During classroom observation in Grade XI at SMKN 2 Katapang, for instance, the teacher began the lesson by asking students to open their textbooks to the chapter “Environmental Awareness.” The teacher read the first paragraph aloud and then immediately asked for the meanings of several difficult words, pollution, sustainability, and waste management. This was followed by a series of literal questions from the textbook, such as “What is the main idea of paragraph one?” and “What kind of pollution is mentioned in the text?” Students responded briefly and hesitantly in unison. No follow-up discussion occurred regarding how the environmental issues presented in the text related to students’ own lives along the Citarum River. The teacher continued the next paragraph with the same pattern. Such a situation exemplifies the one-directional nature of classroom reading activities, where meaning is determined by the teacher and textbook rather than emerging through dialogic exploration.

Interviews with several students reinforced this depiction. One student, pseudonym Ar, stated that reading English texts felt like “just doing it to answer the questions at the end.” Although he sometimes understood the content, he admitted that the text’s meaning rarely felt relevant to his life. This reflects how the dominance of textual explanation and question–answer drills in classroom practice fails to foster students’ sense of ownership of meaning. Learners act more as passive receivers of information than as active constructors of

understanding. In another observation at SMAN 1 Margahayu, the teacher devoted nearly the entire class session to explaining the structure of a narrative text and its difficult vocabulary, without providing students an opportunity to discuss the text's content. When the teacher finally asked for students' opinions about the text's moral message, only two responded, while the rest remained silent, waiting passively for further explanation.

This phenomenon highlights a wide gap between teaching reading and learning to read. Teacher-centered instruction tends to treat reading as a mechanical skill that can be transmitted through repetitive drills. Yet, as Kaiser (2022) argues within the framework of the critical pedagogy of literacy, literacy is not merely about decoding texts but about cultivating readers' critical awareness to interpret, question, and connect texts to their social realities. When classrooms are dominated by a transmission pedagogy, where teachers transfer knowledge and students passively receive it, the critical and social dimensions of reading become marginalized. Consequently, cognitive strategies that should develop through reflection and dialogue fail to be internalized by learners.

Field observations revealed that most teachers genuinely intended to help students comprehend texts but were constrained by curricular demands, exam formats, and inherited pedagogical habits. In an interview, a teacher at SMAS Pasundan 3, pseudonym Ms. H, confessed that she often felt she "did not have enough time for extended discussions" because of the need to complete materials on schedule. She acknowledged that students were "more active when the reading related to their lives," yet large class sizes and exam pressures often pushed her back toward conventional methods. This situation reflects a structural dilemma within the education system, where literacy achievement continues to be assessed through standardized testing rather than through reflective meaning-making processes.

An overly teacher-centered approach also contributes to the weak transfer of cognitive reading strategies. Students who are guided through every stage of reading tend to underdevelop self-monitoring and the ability to evaluate their own comprehension. They read to find the "correct answers" rather than to construct meaningful understanding. One student from SMKN 2 Katapang, pseudonym Nf, admitted that she rarely predicted or inferred meaning because she was "afraid of being wrong." The teacher was perceived as the only person possessing the "right answers." This fear reveals how authoritative classroom structures hinder the development of cognitive autonomy. In this context, teacher-centered reading instruction not only restricts interpretive space but also cultivates cognitive dependency that obstructs the formation of independent reading strategies.

Moreover, the disconnection between teachers' approaches and students' social experiences creates a gap in meaning that is difficult to bridge. In one observation at SMAN 1 Margahayu, the reading material focused on urban festivals in Europe. Students struggled to understand the content because they could not relate it to their own experiences. The teacher explained the text literally in Indonesian but did not invite students to interpret its social or cultural implications. As a result, the session became dry and minimally interactive. After class, several students admitted feeling bored because they "did not see what it had to do

with us.” This indicates that without relevant social context, reading instruction loses its vitality as a dynamic process of meaning-making.

This phenomenon can be analyzed through the critical pedagogy of literacy proposed by Sua (2021), which asserts that reading must be understood as a social and political practice, not merely an academic skill. Within a critical paradigm, students should be positioned as subjects who possess voices and perspectives toward texts rather than as passive objects of instruction. Effective reading instruction should create opportunities for students to question textual ideas, relate them to lived experiences, and negotiate meaning reflectively. When students are encouraged to participate actively, they not only comprehend the text but also understand how language shapes worldviews. In the Indonesian context, where classrooms are often governed by hierarchical relationships, this approach offers a pathway toward a more dialogic and emancipatory form of literacy.

The persistence of teacher-centered practices also signals the need for renewed teacher education and curriculum design. Teachers must be equipped with the understanding that reading strategies cannot be taught in isolation from learners’ social contexts. Pedagogical training should encourage teachers to act as facilitators who guide students in constructing meaning through discussion, reflection, and collaboration. As Collins et al. (2018) emphasize, genuine education is dialogic and liberatory, wherein teachers and students learn together through reciprocal listening and shared understanding of their worlds. In this sense, reading becomes a site for students to negotiate identity, values, and social experience through engagement with global texts.

Toward a Cognitive-Sociolinguistic Reading Framework

The final section of this study synthesizes empirical findings into a conceptual model termed the Cognitive–Sociolinguistic Reading Framework. This framework integrates two major dimensions of reading comprehension: the cognitive layer, representing individual mental processes, and the sociolinguistic layer, representing the social and cultural contexts of learning. Through the integration of these layers, the study posits that reading comprehension is not an isolated mental act but the product of dynamic interaction among the reader, the text, and the surrounding social world. In Indonesian EFL contexts, this model is especially relevant, as students encounter texts that are foreign not only linguistically but also culturally and socially, thereby requiring complex processes of meaning negotiation.

Findings from the three schools indicate that successful comprehension emerged when students combined cognitive strategies, such as prediction, inference, and monitoring, with social engagement in meaning-making. For example, when reading a text about environmental awareness in England, many students initially struggled to understand unfamiliar concepts and practices. However, when the teacher linked the discussion to the Citarum River clean-up program, comprehension deepened considerably. Meaning, therefore, was not simply received but negotiated through bridges to relevant social experiences. The teacher acted as a mediator connecting the cognitive and sociolinguistic dimensions of reading.

In interviews, one student, pseudonym RZ, explained that he only truly understood the author's intent after the teacher provided a locally familiar example. Initially, he followed the text "word by word," but after classroom discussion connected the topic to environmental issues in his village, he "could finally visualize it." This demonstrates an active and socially grounded cognitive process: understanding emerges when linguistic experience intersects with lived experience. Seufert (2018) supports this view, noting that reading in EFL contexts involves a "strategic interaction between text and the reader's background knowledge," here extended to include the reader's sociocultural world.

Classroom observations further revealed that when instruction allowed social exploration of meaning, students displayed higher engagement and cognitive reflection. During a session on the text *The Green Festival in London*, for example, the teacher opened discussion by asking about environmental festivals in Indonesia. The classroom became animated, students shared recycling initiatives from their communities and compared local practices to those described in the text. In this dialogic setting, cognitive and social interaction developed organically. Students not only processed information mentally but also negotiated meaning collectively through shared dialogue and experience.

Based on this analysis, the Cognitive–Sociolinguistic Reading Framework consists of three interconnected layers. The first, the Cognitive Layer, involves mental processes such as prediction, inference, monitoring, and metacognitive reflection, internal dimensions through which readers regulate and evaluate their understanding of the text. However, as Chew and Cerbin (2021) explain in social semiotics theory, meaning in a text is never static but continually reshaped through social context. Thus, the second layer, the Sociolinguistic Layer, represents the social and cultural fields that shape how students read and interpret texts, including local values, communication norms, and experiential schemas.

These two layers interact within the third, the Interaction Zone, a conceptual space where meaning is negotiated through dialogue between the text and the reader's social world. Here, reading instruction achieves equilibrium: the text provides structure and potential meaning, while readers contribute contextual experience and values. This zone mirrors classroom conditions where discussion, questioning, and student reflection become arenas for dynamic social meaning construction. Reading comprehension, therefore, is not a final product of decoding but a "living process" that evolves through social interaction.

Field data reinforce this framework's relevance. In one school, when the teacher asked students to find local examples of urban pollution while reading an expository text, engagement and inferential skills improved markedly. Students connected textual information with local realities, demonstrating how cognitive strategies operate most effectively when socially contextualized. Duke et al. (2021) similarly argue that "strategic reading operates best when grounded in purposeful engagement with content."

Teacher interviews further confirmed awareness of the need to contextualize texts to prevent rote learning. A teacher, pseudonym HN, observed that "students understand faster when the text is connected to their own lives." This aligns with Peng and Kievit's (2020) situated literacy theory, which asserts that literacy cannot be separated from the social

practices in which it is enacted. In EFL contexts, reading ability depends not only on linguistic competence but also on how far readers feel the text “speaks” to their lived realities.

The analysis further suggests that the Cognitive–Sociolinguistic Reading Framework carries practical implications for language education in Southeast Asia. In contexts where English is often viewed as a symbol of modernity and globalization, this framework underscores the importance of preserving social and cultural relevance in learning. EFL readers in the region cannot be equated with native English readers; they bring unique identities, values, and experiences that shape meaning-making. Consequently, this framework offers a bridge to reconcile the tension between linguistic globalization and cultural locality that frequently characterizes EFL education.

Implications for EFL Pedagogy and Literacy Development

The findings of this study underscore the urgent need for a fundamental renewal in reading pedagogy within Indonesian EFL classrooms so that instructional practices no longer remain confined to linguistic routines, but evolve into reflective, contextualized, and socially meaningful literacy experiences. Based on the evidence indicating a close relationship between cognitive strategies and sociocultural mediation in comprehension processes, the development of literacy pedagogy must advance toward an approach that cultivates strategy awareness and emotional engagement in students’ meaning-making. Reading should thus be reconceptualized not as a mechanical transfer of information from text to mind, but as a dialogic space among language, culture, and the reader’s self-awareness.

Classroom observations in three secondary schools across Bandung Regency revealed that when teachers provided opportunities for students to reflect on their thought processes, they tended to demonstrate deeper textual understanding. In several classrooms, the researcher noted the use of reflective reading activities such as think-aloud, in which students were encouraged to verbalize their thoughts while reading. In one session at SMA C, for example, the teacher asked students to explain their predictions before reading a narrative text titled *A Day without Plastic*. Students were then invited to confirm their predictions during reading and to discuss them afterward. This seemingly simple activity transformed the classroom atmosphere into a more interactive space; previously passive students began to realize how their thinking strategies contributed to comprehension. Such experiences illustrate how metacognitive engagement directly enhances reading proficiency (Barber & Klauda, 2020).

Nevertheless, these practices remain rare and unsystematic. Many teachers acknowledged, as stated by HN, one of the participating teachers, that they tended to focus on exercises and translation tasks due to the pressures of national examinations and limited instructional time. She admitted that “there is often no time to invite students to think about how they read; what matters is that they can answer the questions.” This remark reflects a widespread situation in which the reflective dimension of reading is frequently overlooked. Therefore, this study implies the need to integrate activities such as think-aloud protocols, reading journals, and guided reflection as part of classroom routines to build continuous strategy awareness.

From the perspective of reading content, the findings also demonstrate the importance of using culturally relevant texts to enhance student engagement and motivation. When texts reflect learners' social realities, they exhibit higher emotional engagement and richer inferential processes. In one classroom observation at SMP B, the teacher linked a text on urban pollution in London to local environmental issues in Bandung. Students spontaneously compared the condition of nearby rivers to the description of the Thames in the text. This discussion generated critical comments that reflected deep comprehension, such as reflections on how local communities could participate in environmental preservation. Such phenomena support the notion of situated literacy (Kwarikunda et al., 2022), which emphasizes that reading practices are always embedded in the reader's social and cultural contexts.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that reading motivation is shaped not only by interest in the topic but also by the perceived identity connection between the text and the learner's lived experience. In other words, contextualized texts serve not merely as tools for language learning but also as media for constructing social and emotional connections between readers and the wider world. As expressed by AD, one of the student participants, he "preferred texts that felt close to life here," because foreign texts often felt "distant from reality." This statement highlights that literacy is not solely a linguistic competence but also an existential experience, one through which students construct self-meaning in relation to their world.

Another key implication concerns teacher professional development. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening teachers' understanding that reading is a social practice rather than a purely cognitive skill. Indonesian EFL teachers need to be equipped with insight into how students' sociocultural contexts shape reading processes and how teachers can act as social mediators who help students connect texts to their lived realities. In professional training, teachers can be introduced to contextual scaffolding strategies, that is, techniques that connect textual meaning with local experiences and cultural values, to make learning more relevant and inclusive. Moreover, teacher education curricula should emphasize reflective pedagogy, in which teachers not only transmit knowledge but also facilitate critical and reflective engagement with texts.

Within this framework, the Cognitive–Sociolinguistic Reading Framework developed in this study offers a new direction for literacy pedagogy in Indonesia. This framework serves as a guide for teachers to design reading activities that balance cognitive and social dimensions. Practically, teachers can adopt a dual-layer approach: first, stimulate students' cognitive awareness through explicit thinking activities such as inference, prediction, and monitoring; second, contextualize meaning by linking texts to students' social experiences. This combination enables students to move beyond literal comprehension toward critical and reflective interpretation.

From a policy perspective, these findings carry significant implications for national curriculum development. English language education in Indonesia, which has long emphasized structural and lexical mastery, should shift toward a more contextualized and

humanistic literacy approach. The Cognitive–Sociolinguistic Reading Framework can be adapted as a model for developing teaching materials that foreground meaning-making and cultural relevance. For instance, within the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, the principle of “context-based learning” can be integrated into text selection and reading activities that encourage students to relate content to social issues in their own communities. Such initiatives would not only enrich linguistic understanding but also strengthen students’ social consciousness as active readers within their society.

Additionally, this study holds important implications for the advancement of critical literacy in educational policy. By conceptualizing reading as a social practice, policymakers can promote initiatives that prioritize student empowerment rather than merely improving literacy scores. As emphasized within the Critical Pedagogy of Literacy (Elleman & Oslund, 2019), language learning should provide students with opportunities to negotiate meaning, question textual ideologies, and construct critical positions toward the world. In the Indonesian context, characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity, such an approach is essential to cultivating literacy that is plural, reflective, and rooted in social reality.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that reading comprehension in Indonesian EFL classrooms results from the dynamic interaction between individual cognitive strategies and sociocultural mediation within instructional contexts. Through the integration of cognitive and sociolinguistic approaches, the findings demonstrate that students’ comprehension is shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by their activation of metacognitive strategies, such as prediction, inference, and self-monitoring, within socially meaningful settings. When textual content is connected to learners’ local experiences and cultural values, meaning-making becomes more reflective and participatory, enhancing both conceptual understanding and emotional engagement. However, teacher-centered instructional practices often constrain these potentials, signaling the need for a paradigm shift that repositions reading as both a social and mental activity. Within this paradigm, the Cognitive–Sociolinguistic Reading Framework developed in this study provides theoretical and practical contributions to literacy pedagogy in EFL contexts. It affirms that authentic literacy flourishes when readers do not merely decode texts but actively negotiate meaning at the intersection of language, culture, and lived experience.

ETHICAL STATEMENT AND DISCLOSURE

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical principles, including informed consent, protection of informants’ confidentiality, and respect for local cultural values. Special consideration was given to participants from vulnerable groups to ensure their safety, comfort, and equal rights to participate. No external funding was received, and the authors declare no conflict of interest. All data and information presented were collected through valid research methods and have been verified to ensure their accuracy and reliability. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) was limited to technical assistance for writing and language editing, without influencing the scientific substance of the work. The authors

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